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SUBJECT: CABINET SHUFFLE, MINISTERIAL MERRY-GO-ROUND

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Classified by Ambassador Dennise Mathieu, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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¶1. (C) On April 8, President Pohamba announced a much anticipated cabinet reshuffle -- then fired no one. The few portfolio changes that Pohamba adopted appear to be those that did not challenge the traditional power base loyal to Founding President Sam Nujoma. Working around that big constraint, Pohamba appears to have made a few changes intended to improve some ministries. Although Pohamba may have lost an opportunity to reshape his team, he likely did not want to rock the boat given the delicate balance of power within the ruling party. End summary.

¶2. (U) See para. 12 for the full cabinet list with Embassy comments on each.

Deck Chairs and One Substantive Change

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¶3. (C) After more than a year of unfulfilled rumors, Pohamba announced his first cabinet shuffle since taking office in 2005. Other than the very ill, former Minister of Safety and Security, Peter Tsheehama, no sitting minister lost his job. Moreover, the only new faces on the team were well-known SWAPO figures: former Ambassador Peter Katjavivi, who becomes the Director General of the National Planning Commission (MCC's counterpart), and Hage Geingob who becomes Minister of Trade and Industry (MTI). Geingob's reentry into the ministerial fold was no surprise given his election to the vice-presidency of the SWAPO party in late 2007 (reftel). The return to leadership by the capable Geingob could be a positive development for MTI, which languished under his predecessor.

¶4. (C) Moving into the Ministry of Works and Transport is Helmut Angula, former Director General of the National Planning Commission and counterpart on Millennium Challenge Account negotiations. Angula and his Deputy, Paul Smit, have a big task of cleaning up the Works Ministry, which has been mired in corruption allegations for years. Smit, a good manager known for his honesty, told the DCM that "Works is a mess", and that he and Angula would find out what was going on in that Ministry and deal with it. The fact that two good contacts are now in charge of Works could be a boon in the Embassy's efforts to acquire GRN-owned land for a New Embassy Compound.

¶5. (SBU) One of the most notable figures to shift portfolios was hardline Lands Minister Jerry Ekandjo. He picks up the job at Ministry of Regional, Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, filling the position vacated by deceased Minister John Pandeni. The portfolio change appears to be a lateral move that will allow him to travel the country in pursuit of his other job, SWAPO

Chief of Information. Alpheus !Naruseb takes the Lands job. Although no superstar, !Naruseb will likely be a much less antagonistic figure than Ekandjo, who often refused to meet with the commercial farmers union. Having a less polarizing presence at Lands may be a positive development given the sensitivity of the land issue and its possible use as a red herring during elections.

¶16. (C) Most notably untouched (many would say unfortunately) by this reshuffle was Minister of Justice Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana. A strident Nujoma supporter and hawkish figure, Ithana remains triple-hatted as the Minister of Justice, Attorney General, and Secretary General of the SWAPO Party. Her competing roles have created what many argue are unhealthy conflicts of interest pitting her party loyalties against her ministerial duties.

¶17. (C) Other key figures who proved unmovable (likely due to the strength of their political patrons) were lackluster Minister of Foreign Affairs Marco Hausiku, underworked Minister of Presidential Affairs Albert Kawana, party stalwart Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration Rosalia Nghidinwa, and Nujoma's relative, Finance Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila. On a positive note, at least from a PEPFAR perspective, is the continued presence of the effective Minister Richard Kamwi at the helm of Health and Social Services.

¶18. (U) The only substantive change from this reshuffle was the removal of the communications portfolio from the Ministry of Works and Transport. Communications now falls under the newly named Ministry of Information and Communications Technology.

Expected, but Disappointing  
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¶19. (U) In the past few days, the independent Namibian newspaper has printed countless SMS messages from ordinary citizens who were highly

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critical of the reshuffle. The biggest gripe is that the President did not so much reshuffle as "recycle" without any repercussions for ministers whose operations have failed to provide services to the people. "A ministerial merry-go-round continues ad nauseam for 18 years" wrote one disgruntled Namibian.

¶10. (C) In a rare comment on domestic politics, MFA Permanent Secretary Veiccoh Ngihwete told DCM on April 9 that the reshuffle was

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a disappointment because it only changed portfolios without bringing in enough new blood (itself an interesting aside as Ngihwete is very much SWAPO "old blood" himself). Our contacts in the media and other sectors share the disappointment. Most analysts recognize, however, that Pohamba may have felt constrained on one side by the risk of alienating progressives who could jump to the opposition and on the other by the danger of angering the stalwarts who remain faithful to Sam Nujoma and the memories of the liberation struggle. With no political base of his own, Pohamba could not risk a major upsetting of the guard, one SWAPO MP told PolOff.

Comment  
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¶11. (C) When rumors of a cabinet shake-up surfaced over a year ago, many people had high hopes that Pohamba would form a cabinet independent from that formed by Founding President Sam Nujoma. As time progressed, fewer Namibians believed Pohamba would take such a bold move at the risk of chasing comrades into the arms of the opposition, or angering hardliners loyal to Nujoma. Accordingly, Pohamba appears only to have moved the people and portfolios that matter little to Nujoma and his closest allies. In the end, this reshuffle will mostly serve to calm the anxious ministers who have long waited for the axe to fall, allowing them to get back to their jobs and feel secure in their positions at least until the November 2009 elections. Business as usual on a ministerial merry-go-round.  
End comment.

Minister List and Embassy Comments on Each  
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¶12. (C) Following is the full list of the new cabinet, listed by Minister and Deputy Minister, with Embassy comments. Two stars (\*\*) before the name indicates a change.

#### Agriculture

\*\* John Mutorwa. He was fairly well respected at Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sports and Culture, and very supportive of Peace Corps. This former teacher and long-time cabinet member does not have any particular expertise in agriculture. Definitely a promotion, but not clear why.

\*\* Isak Katali. He is best known in the international community for his outrageous statements -- made as Deputy Minister of Lands and Resettlement -- in support of Mugabe's land reform program in Zimbabwe. Katali is unlikely to bring much to the table, other than his political connections to the more traditional SWAPO powerbase close to Nujoma.

#### Foreign Affairs

-- Marco Hausiku. According to SWAPO insiders, Hausiku refused to budge and won, despite his well-earned reputation as one of Namibia's least effective ministers. His ties to Nujoma, strength in the party, and position as one of the few Kavangos in the Cabinet saved him his seat. Nevertheless, Pohamba's recent appointment of a Special Advisor for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Tuliameni Kalomoh, may indicate an effort by Pohamba to improve the effectiveness of the Ministry.

-- Lempy Lucas. This unimpressive deputy seems to have secured her place in life on the speech circuit for foreign embassies' national days: "please join me in proposing a toast..."

#### Information and Communications Technology

\*\* Joel Kaapanda, former Minister of Works. Kaapanda was originally sent to the Works Ministry to clean it up, which he does not appear to have achieved, despite a fair reputation as an effective manager. It remains to be seen exactly what his ministry will do with its new focus on communications technology.

-- Raphael Dinyando

#### Defense

-- Charles Ndaxu (Ho-Chi Minh) Namoloh

-- Victor Simunja

#### Finance

-- Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila. Although she has grown into her job and by many accounts done well, she has not challenged the powers that be on budgeting decisions. She has become increasingly impressive in our view over the past three years due to her increased knowledge and decisiveness in dealing with issues. Clutch magazine

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recently named her one of 21 Women of Power and Achievement. With Nujoma as a patron and relation through adoption (and allegedly at one point a lover), her position seems secure.

-- Tjekero Tweya

#### Fisheries

-- Dr Abraham Iyambo

-- Kilus Nguvauva

#### Health and Social Services

-- Dr Richard Kamwi. He is a good partner. Probably good for PEPFAR that he stays.

-- Petrina Haingura

#### Home Affairs

-- Rosalia Nghidinwa

\*\* Stephanus Mogotsi. He is energetic and talks the talk of efficiency; however no one may be up to the task of making Home Affairs an efficient ministry.

#### Environment & Tourism

\*\* Nethumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. Although she has long been suspected as a supporter of RDP leader Hidipo Hamutenya, the fact she maintained a portfolio could be viewed as a sign that Pohamba does not want to alienate progressives.

#### Labor and Social Welfare

\*\* Immanuel Ngatjizeko. Not sure why he picked up this job, although his lack of skills may be less harmful to Namibian interests than it was at Trade and Industry.

-- Petrus Iilonga. Rarely without his Che Guevara beret, the unimpressive Iilonga remains a loyal liberation fighter. During the recent funeral for deceased Minister Jonn Pandeni, Iilonga rambled for two hours about his own feats as a PLAN fighter in the bush.

#### Lands and Resettlement

\*\* Alpheus !Naruseb. Although he is no superstar, he will likely be a much less antagonistic figure than Ekandjo, who often refused to meet with the commercial farmers. As the former Minister of Labor, he is accustomed to trying to resolve conflicting interests.

\*\* Henock ya Kasita. Close ties to Nujoma. Not sure why he was moved to Lands.

#### Mines and Energy

-- Erkki Nghimtina

\*\* Bernhard Esau, Deputy. We are told he is a hard worker and could be an asset in a ministry that has seen increased activity in the last few years.

#### National Planning Commission (Director General)

\*\* Peter Katjavivi. Spent the last five years on the diplomatic circuit in Europe, most recently as Ambassador to Germany and previously to the EU. Before that, he was Vice Chancellor at the University of Namibia. He is considered a solid manager.

#### Regional, Local Government, Housing and Rural Development

\*\* Jerry Ekandjo. Ekandjo moves from Lands and Resettlement back to the Ministry where he started in 1990 as a Deputy. Ekandjo is a true firebrand who still fondly reminisces about petrol bombing apartheid South African installations in Walvis Bay during the liberation struggle. He is also wont to remind Namibians that the Boers (read: whites) are not to be trusted. He can use the new portfolio to travel the country in pursuit of his other job, SWAPO Chief of Information. Given his hawkishness, it is probably a good thing he will not be in charge of the sensitive land portfolio during the 2009 elections.

-- Kazenambo Kazenambo

#### Safety and Security

\*\* Dr. Nickey Iyambo. Pohamba may have wanted an ally at the helm of the security services. Although Iyambo is pleasant and relatively progressive, it is difficult to see how he will genuinely take control of this ministry. He is soft spoken, somewhat ineffectual, and his political fortunes have been on the decline in the past several years. As explained by Iyambo's former Deputy Minister, Paul Smit, Iyambo was always "very diplomatic and did not want to address problems."

-- Gabes Shihepo

#### Trade and Industry

\*\* Hage Geingob. Namibia's first Prime Minister makes an expected comeback. He turned down several portfolios before this offering. He is a solid manager with plenty of relevant managerial and international experience and is likely to be a welcome change compared to his predecessor who seemed to know little about trade.

\*\* Teopolina Mushelenga. A SWAPO stalwart who remains loyal to Nujoma. She may have been placed in Trade as a minder to the

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ever-ambitious Hage Geingob.

#### Works and Transport

\*\* Helmut Angula. Outspoken and independent minded, the outgoing Director General of the National Planning Commission (NPC) has worked before with his new deputy, Paul Smit. They are both action oriented and may be able to tackle the issues of maintenance and neglect of government buildings and assets, as well as other woes at the Ministry of Works.

\*\* Paul Smit. One of only two whites in the cabinet, Smit is a farmer who may have preferred to remain at Agriculture; however, his sound management practices and no-nonsense attitude may help with

housecleaning at Works, which has suffered numerous corruption allegations in past years. A very religious man, Smit confided in the DCM that God told him (Smit) two weeks before the shuffle to wrap up his affairs at Agriculture.

Youth, National Service, Sport & Culture

\*\* Willem Konjore. This is often where they put Ministers out to pasture. Definitely a demotion for this Catholic deacon.

-- Pohamba Shifeta.

MATHIEU